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WILDLIFE SERVICES—MINNESOTA

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Minnesota

Every day, residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on Minnesota Wildlife Services (WS) for help in protecting agriculture, human health and safety, natural resources, and property from damage or threats posed by wildlife. WS' professional wildlife biologists respond to these requests with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

WS works to protect property and reduce human health and safety risks at airports, schools, and along roadways. The program also protects people, pets, and livestock from wildlife-borne diseases; guards many natural resources, such as fisheries and timber, from wildlife depredation; and educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management. Specific projects conducted by Minnesota WS include protecting livestock from predators, preventing or minimizing damage caused by beaver, reducing wildlife hazards at airports, managing problems caused by starlings and pigeons at dairy farms, feed lots and industrial sites, and providing technical assistance to individuals and organizations experiencing nuisance wildlife problems.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this



technical assistance can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Livestock and Domestic Animals from Wolf Predation—

One of the primary functions of Minnesota WS has been to assist livestock producers and pet owners experiencing losses due to wolf predation. Each year, WS receives 100 to 250 complaints about wolves harassing, killing, or wounding livestock and domestic animals including cattle, horses, sheep, poultry and dogs. Once a WS investigator verifies that a wolf is responsible for a livestock loss or the death of a domestic pet, WS captures and removes the wolf. The WS wolf-livestock depredation management program in Minnesota also provides the opportunity to test new wolf capture equipment, such as tranquilizer trap devices, foot snares, and breakaway neck snares. Such research and testing is increasingly important as WS continues to develop more humane and efficient capture methods.

Protecting Dairy Farms and Cattle Feedlots from Starlings—

In 2003, Minnesota WS initiated a pilot starling control program to reduce starling numbers at dairy farms and cattle feedlots experiencing problems with starlings consuming and contaminating cattle feed. WS personnel, who have been trained and certified as pesticide applicators, use DRC-1339 treated bait to reduce starling numbers. Initial evaluations indicate an average reduction in starling numbers of 70 percent at the facilities following treatments.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Investigating complaints of wolf depredations on cattle, horses, sheep, poultry and dogs, and implementing non-lethal and lethal means to reduce this predation
- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes
- Managing damage caused by beaver
- Managing problems caused by starlings and pigeons at dairy farms, feed lots and industrial sites
- Assisting cooperators in obtaining necessary permits for alleviating damage caused by federally protected migratory birds

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Minnesota:

- Managing wolf predation through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife
- Reducing the impacts of double-crested cormorants on other wildlife and fish
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Reducing starling damage at feedlots and dairies
- Preventing the transmission of wildlife diseases to other wildlife and humans

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports—Protecting air travelers and crews from aircraft collisions with wildlife is another important function of the Minnesota WS program. Since 1998, WS has conducted nine single-visit wildlife hazard evaluations, and implemented year-long wildlife hazard assessments at eight Minnesota airports. WS also reviews airport construction and expansion projects for potential wildlife-related hazards. The increasing number of cooperative requests for WS' assistance at airports in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area will likely require additional personnel there in the near future.

Protecting Health and Safety in the Workplace—Minnesota WS conducts feral pigeon (rock dove) control projects at several industrial facilities throughout the state. Droppings from feral pigeons contaminate work areas, posing a potential health and safety hazard for employees at these facilities, and accumulated droppings that corrode valuable equipment. WS utilizes a variety of control methods, including trapping and DRC-1339 to reduce pigeon numbers, and shooting with pellet guns to remove individual pigeons from industrial facilities.

Protecting Threatened Common Terns—Since 2000, Minnesota WS has worked cooperatively with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe to protect a common tern nesting colony on an island in Leech Lake. Common terns are listed as a state threatened species in Minnesota. WS personnel remove predators, such as mink, weasel, otter and fox from the island to enhance common tern reproductive success. WS has also begun a double-crested cormorant control program on the island to protect the tern nesting colony from overcrowding by cormorants. WS also collects cormorants as part of a diet analysis study to help determine the potential impacts of the rapidly increasing cormorant population on the fisheries of Leech Lake.

Protecting Multiple Resources from Beaver Damage—Protecting transportation, agriculture, property, and natural resources through beaver damage management is a major consideration for WS in Minnesota. Historically, beaver were considered a valuable natural resource and an extremely important part of the economy. In recent years, however, little demand for beaver products has resulted in a decrease in trapping, and subsequent increase in beaver numbers. Beaver now occupy nearly all watersheds in the State, and Statewide population estimates are approaching 300,000. While this population escalation has resulted in some benefits derived from beaver activities, such as increased wetland habitat, reduced downstream sedimentation, and improved water quality, the detrimental impacts from beaver activities have also increased. From 1997 to 2004, WS has conducted 126 beaver trapping and dam removal projects. Typical requests for assistance involved damage to roadways and bridges, fish spawning habitat, and forest resources.

Major Cooperators

- United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- Minnesota Department of Health
- University of Minnesota Extension Service
- Minnesota Cattlemen's Association
- St. Louis County Land Department
- Metropolitan Airports Commission

Looking to the Future

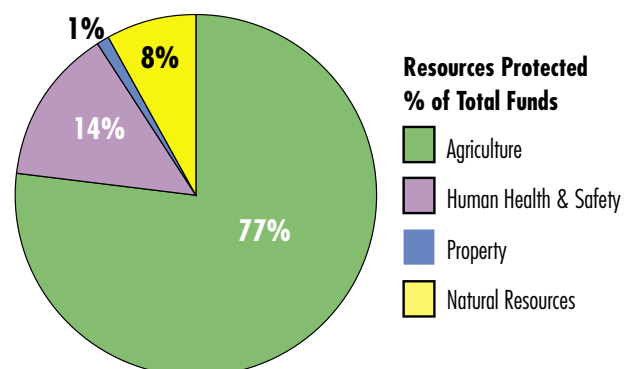
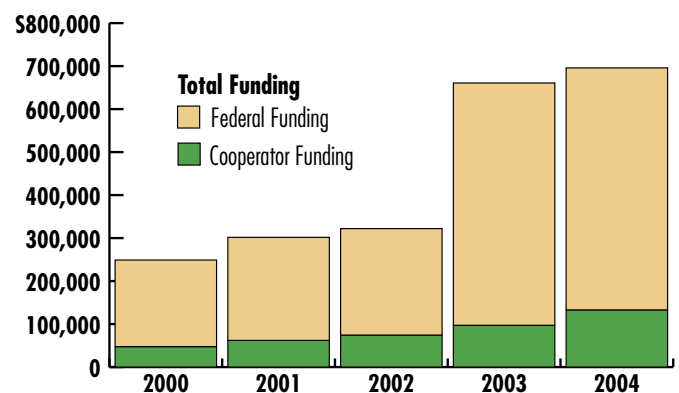
Responding to an increasing number of requests for assistance is an on-going challenge for Minnesota WS. As the wolf population in the State continues to expand into new areas, the need for WS' professional assistance is expected to increase even more.

The growing need for wildlife disease management is also an issue for Minnesota. In 2002, Minnesota verified west Nile virus (WNV) in birds, horses, and humans while chronic wasting disease (CWD) was found at two captive elk farms. In the neighboring state of Wisconsin, CWD has been detected in both captive and wild white-tailed deer. Wildlife diseases, such as WNV and CWD are of serious concern for the Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Board of Animal Health, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. WS will likely provide assistance to these agencies in monitoring or managing these wildlife diseases as funding becomes available.

In Minnesota, public safety is a concern for wildlife managers. This is particularly true at airports. Additional attention must be given to this very specialized area of work.

Minnesota Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and Local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.



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